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## Planners Reduce Adriaen's Landing To 'Human Scale'

By **MATTHEW DALY, DAN HAAR**  
and **ERIC M. WEISS**

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Pratt & Whitney  
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Dramatic changes are in the works for the Adriaen's Landing project, as state officials move closer to building an open-air football stadium in East Hartford, bringing a new basketball arena to the riverfront and maybe even changing the project's name.

How does Twain's Landing sound?



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Under a scenario discussed Wednesday at the state Capitol, the redevelopment project would be reconfigured to locate an open-air football stadium for the University of Connecticut at Rentschler Field in East Hartford.

The savings in building the stadium in East Hartford would allow construction of a new indoor arena for basketball and hockey on the current Adriaen's Landing site along the Connecticut River, and a possible ESPN-themed restaurant in downtown Hartford, sources said.

There is even talk, as the entire concept of the mega-project evolves, of changing the name to Twain's Landing, in honor of author and longtime Hartford resident Mark Twain. The theory behind the name change, say those who support it, is that as well-known as Adriaen's Landing has become in the Hartford area, explorer Adriaen Block is virtually unknown outside of Connecticut.

As for the actual project, top state officials Wednesday began discussing an offer from United Technologies Corp. to donate 75 acres at Rentschler Field for use as a 40,000-seat, open-air stadium for an upgraded UConn football program.

During a meeting with Gov. John G. Rowland last week, UTC Chairman George David offered to give the state the site - located at the former Pratt & Whitney airfield off Main Street - at no cost, sources said.

The move, which Rowland is expected to announce at a press conference this morning, would free up land at Adriaen's Landing for upscale housing and retail use. It also would allow developers to achieve a goal that has become increasingly important in recent weeks: making Adriaen's Landing attractive on a human scale.

The sheer size of the stadium - which would rise 240 feet above ground - has caused officials to rethink whether it belongs in downtown Hartford.

The answer, for now, is no.

In order for Adriaen's Landing - or Twain's Landing - to work, "it needs to be scaled to the neighborhood," said John Elkington, a Tennessee-based developer who briefed Rowland and other state officials Wednesday on the new plans.

When he first got involved in the project this summer, it "had a scale that dwarfed the neighborhood. We've reduced it down to a human scale," said Elkington, who oversees the popular Beale Street project in Memphis, Tenn. He was brought to Hartford by Len and Mark Wolman, the Waterford developers Rowland has selected to oversee Adriaen's Landing.

Rowland acknowledged the height of the stadium is a concern, but he declined to say in detail what he will announce at today's press conference.

"We're going to have some good news" that will address "the ever-changing, evolving ideas to improve the concept" of the development project, Rowland said.

The Wolmans and others involved in the project emphasized that it remains a work in progress, and said further changes are likely as they try to figure out what will work on the 33-acre site.

The new plan has several advantages, supporters said. First, it keeps a sports venue alongside the convention center - considered a key to attracting people to the area - without committing the space needed for a football stadium.

Until this week, plans had called for the stadium to accommodate baseball as well as football. That dictated the height. Now, sources said, a baseball stadium would be out of the picture, in favor of a new civic center-style arena for basketball or hockey.

The move to East Hartford would also remove time pressure from the Adriaen's Landing project, because it would allow UConn to begin playing there as early as 2003.

UConn, in its final season of Division I-AA football in the Atlantic 10 Conference, needs a stadium with at least 30,000 seats to meet I-A membership criteria.

UConn athletic director Lew Perkins was pleased with the latest developments.

"We're really excited about it because it resolves all the issues," Perkins said. "There are no environmental problems, from what I'm told. We can build a good size stadium there [on 75 acres]."

"All of the places have made sense. But this is a very, very good site because there's great access. It's close to both I-91 and 84. And it's a little closer, not much, but a little closer to campus."

The move also would shave as much as \$170 million off the price tag for the football stadium - money that could be spent instead on the indoor arena, said R. Bartley Halloran, chairman of the Capital City Economic Development Authority.

Because the land in East Hartford is being donated and there is no need for a dome, the project could be built for as little as \$40 million, sources said.

A new riverfront indoor arena also would help a related project to convert

the current Civic Center mall downtown into housing. Sources said Northland Corp., which is working on a plan to develop the Civic Center into housing, would rather level the 21-year-old arena, as well as the mall, because it would be cheaper and easier than building around it.

Bristol-based ESPN also could play a role in the new plans, although it was not clear Wednesday if the TV sports network is interested in participating. Rowland visited ESPN headquarters Monday and made a pitch for the company to build an ESPN Zone - a gigantic themed-restaurant with large-screen TVs and interactive games - in Hartford, sources said.

The company currently operates three ESPN Zones - in Baltimore, New York City and Chicago - and has plans for three more. A company spokesman confirmed Rowland's visit but declined to comment on whether or not ESPN is interested in Hartford.

Elkington said getting ESPN to participate is crucial.

"ESPN is a huge brand name in Connecticut, and we need to have their presence," he said.

The new concept immediately found two believers who will be crucial to its success. Senate President Pro Tem Kevin B. Sullivan, D-West Hartford, and House Speaker Moira K. Lyons, D-Stamford, will help decide when - and if - to release \$455 million in state funding for the convention center and stadium project.

"I know all of us had concerns about a wall of concrete in front of the river that would not be user-friendly and would essentially seal off a portion of the city," Lyons said.

Lyons, who attended Wednesday's briefing, said the new plan is on a "people-sized scale" that should be inviting to restaurants, retailers and entertainment venues.

Sullivan agreed. He called the latest plan "a persuasive idea, because it comes from the people who are going to have to make this work."

Hartford City Council Minority Leader John B. O'Connell was not convinced.

"I thought the purpose was to redevelop Hartford, not East Hartford," O'Connell said. "I don't know much about the details, but the ones I have heard I don't understand the thinking."

The 700-acre Rentschler Field is in the center of East Hartford, and is considered by many area officials to be one of the most attractive commercial/industrial properties in southern New England, in part because it is flat and has easy access to I-84, I-91 and Route 2.

Pratt officials tried luring a Six Flags amusement park to the site two years ago, but those talks fell through.

*Courant Staff Writer Ken Davis contributed to this story.*

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